

THE IDENTIFICATION OF AN ARGENTINIAN NARCOTIC

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There are few narcotic plants known to have been used by the Indians of Argentina, tobacco and cebil are almost the only examples.

The identification of another, however, remained uncertain: the root of a plant called *coro*. It was early mentioned by Padre Pedro Lozano, a Jesuit who lived and worked in Argentina in the 18th century, but whose writings were published much later. The plant was employed as a narcotic by the Calchaqui Indians as an additive to their alcoholic beverage *chicha*: "... mando echar en la chicha ciertas raices molidas que llaman coro y son muy eficaces para embriagar ..."

More recently, there are other references to the use of this root powdered and smoked either alone or mixed with tobacco among the Chaco Indians (Mocovies, Tobas and Matacos). The same common name was used among all these natives.

My recent studies have disclosed that several species of the genus *Trichocline* (*Compositae: Mutisieae*) bear the same common name in Argentina — *coro* — as well as the ethnopharmacologically significant name *contrayerba*.

The rhizome is today employed extensively alone or mixed with tobacco as a fumitory. This use is very widespread, occurring in almost all areas where the Argentinian species are represented in the flora. The species most frequently utilized is *T. reptans* (Wedd.) Rob., the commonest in the Chaco region. In the Andean regions, *T. exscapa* Griseb. and *T. dealbata* (Hook. et Arn.) Griseb. are the species employed.

The rhizome of all the species is thick and woody. The leaves are borne in rosettes. The scapes have beautiful yellow inflorescences.

One use of the rhizome in folk medicine is reported to be smoking as an effective cure for "stomach ache".

Chemical studies of this genus have apparently not been car-

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ried out, but the role that *Trichocline* plays in Argentinian folk medicine and in Indian customs would seem to justify analysis for active constituents.

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PLATE 17



Plate 17. *Trichocline reptans* (Wedd.) Rob. — Photographed in situ, Chaco, Argentina. — Photograph by Elsa Zardini.